

## **Executive Summary**

*Objectives:* This report describes the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of young people regarding tobacco use, their exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), pro-tobacco as well as anti-tobacco advertisement. In addition, it reveals the extent to which these young people receive anti-tobacco information in schools.

*Method:* We conducted a multistage, school-based, two-cluster survey (n=4178, age=13-15 years) in government and private schools using a standardized questionnaire based on the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS).

*Results:* Smoking prevalence was 14.3% for boys and 2.9% for girls. 25% of students 1<sup>st</sup> tried smoking at less than ten years of age. More than 25% of non-smokers and more than 60% of current smokers are exposed to ETS in their homes and in public places. More than 70% of boys and girls saw a tobacco advertisement, and 20% of them were offered free cigarettes from a tobacco company representative. Moreover, 50% of young people buy their cigarettes from stores, and 80% of them were not refused to buy cigarettes because of their age.

*Conclusion:* The youth prevalence of smoking is alarming, especially in the presence of an environment that supports smoking. Young people are daily exposed to ETS, tobacco advertisement and can access tobacco products easily. Immediate action is required to limit youth exposure to ETS and accessibility, issue legislation to prohibit selling smoking to minors, ban tobacco advertising and create a supportive environment to the health of young people.

## **I- Preface**

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) is the first comprehensive and representative school-based study of youth smoking knowledge, attitudes and beliefs conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study, which was conducted by the Ministries of Health and Education, used an internationally standardized instrument that facilitates comparing youth behavior regarding tobacco use at the regional as well as the international level.

Moreover, the study design, data collection and analysis were carried under the direct supervision of the Office of Tobacco and Health - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (OSH/CDC) and the Tobacco Free Initiative Office-The Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office of the World Health Organization (TFI/EMRO/WHO).

## **II- Introduction**

Tobacco use is one of the chief preventable causes of death in the world. The World Health Organization attributes some four million deaths a year to tobacco use, a figure expected to rise to about 8.4 million by the year 2020. By that time, 70% of those deaths will occur in

developing countries. Most people begin using tobacco in their teens, and recent trends indicate rising smoking prevalence rates among children and adolescents and earlier age of initiation. If these patterns continue, tobacco will result in the deaths of 250 million children and adolescents alive today, many of them in the developing world.

The international society, spearheaded by the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office On Smoking and Health (OSH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has been developing international programs and initiatives to combat this man-made plague which is devastating the lives of millions of people worldwide. However, regardless of the worldwide movement against tobacco, tobacco companies still control the tobacco market. They produce over one trillion sticks, over a billion smokers and influences ever increasing people, especially the young to start smoking every year.

Despite the harm caused by smoking only modest success has been achieved in global tobacco control. It is clear that children and young people are now more at risk than ever before and they should be the primary focus for intervention strategies.

### **II.1- Tobacco use in the UAE**

Tobacco is not cultivated but extensively traded in the United Arab Emirates. UAE used to be ranked in seventh place on the worldwide tobacco trade map; however, more than 80% of the tobacco imports are re-exported to neighboring countries. The number of cigarette factories has increased tremendously in the last ten years.

Rules and regulations for tobacco use control in the country are restricted to the following:

- Displaying a health warning, nicotine and tar contents on cigarette packs.
- Banning smoking on board flight of the two national carriers, EMIRATES AIRLINES and GULF AIR.
- Increasing taxation to 100%, effective since July 2000
- Banning advertising in the national television, only ground television, and radio stations.
- Banning smoking in the Ministries of Health and Education premises
- Banning smoking in government offices in Sharjah Emirate.

In addition, the Ministry of Health launched a smoking cessation program in 1999. As a result seven smoking cessation units were opened. They received an average of 1000 smokers during the past two years, 23% of whom succeed in quitting smoking. Also the Ministry of Health commemorates WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY and ARAB ANTI-TOBACCO DAY, and launches periodic public awareness campaigns on the health, economic, social and cultural consequences of tobacco use.

Accurate and representative prevalence data on tobacco use among children and young adults are not available. However, the family health survey conducted in 1995 that covered 45830 UAE citizens revealed that 18.3% of adult males and 0.4% of adult females were current smokers. A second study conducted by the UAE University at Al Ain on 1500 male students aged 16-19 years in three governmental secondary schools in 1997 revealed an ever increasing prevalence among young adults accounting for 28.2%. The highest prevalence was seen among the 17 years old (43%).

## **II.2- GYTS – goals and objectives**

The GYTS is a school-based tobacco specific survey which focuses on adolescents age 13-15 years (grades 7-10). It assesses students' attitudes, knowledge and behavior related to tobacco use and exposure to environmental tobacco Smoke (ETS), as well as youth exposure to prevention activities in school curricula, community programs, and media messages aimed at preventing and reducing youth tobacco use. Also the GYTS provides information on where tobacco products are obtained and used, as well as the effectiveness of enforcement measures.

The GYTS will attempt to address the following issues:

- Determining the level of tobacco use
- Estimating the age of initiation of cigarette use
- Estimating the levels of susceptibility to become a cigarette smoker
- Estimating the exposure to tobacco advertising
- Identifying key intervening variables, such as attitudes and beliefs on behavioral norms with regard to tobacco use among young people
- Assessing the extent to which major prevention programs are reaching school-based populations and establish the subjective opinions of those populations regarding such interventions.